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ABSTRACT

One hundred and forty-three parents of preschool age children were surveyed (1) to determine their beliefs about discipline at home and at the preschool, and (2) to ascertain relationships between these beliefs and demographic characteristics. Parents indicated the extent to which they expected teachers to solve classroom problems according to each of three discipline approaches: the interventionist approach, which follows social learning principles and endorses authoritative discipline; the non-interventionist approach, which follows psychodynamic principles and endorses non-directive discipline; and the interactionist approach, which follows reality therapy principles and endorses negotiated discipline. It was acknowledged that parents might endorse more than one discipline approach, but one approach was expected to predominate in an individual's beliefs. Most parents endorsed the interventionist approach in the home, a third endorsed the interactionist approach at home, and less than a tenth endorsed the non-interventionist approach. Parents expected teachers to use these approaches in approximately the same proportions. However, nearly 25 per cent of the parents demonstrated a double-standard, expecting schools to be more authoritative than the home. Educational background of the parent, and gender of child, (but not of parent) were associated with type of discipline endorsed. Appendices include the data-gathering instrument and the scoring key. (Author/DB)

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Parents' Views of Discipline in the Preschool and the Home

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This paper was presented at the 1981 Annual Conference of the National Association for the Education of Young Children(NAEYC), November 5-8, 1981, in Detroit, Michigan.

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Parents' Views of Discipline in the Preschool and the Home

Both teachers and parents see classroom discipline as a major problem (Feldhusen, 1978; Gallup, 1981). However, there is little agreement on what parents view as the most desirable or effective approach: On one hand highly vocal parents call for strict discipline including corporal punishment and school suspensions while other parents reject strong discipline measures, taking schools to courts that have ruled in favor of students' civil rights (Harris and Fields, 1977; Manley-Casimer, 1978). This is especially a concern for preschool and kindergarten programs whose enrollment and community support often depend on whether the parents endorse the discipline approach used in the programs. Also, early childhood education has generally held a child-centered philosophy, but community sentiment may be antithetical to this approach. The problem is exacerbated too when educators themselves disagree on the various approaches to discipline.

The purposes of the study reported here were (1) to determine what beliefs parents of preschoolers held about discipline at home and at the preschool, and (2) to ascertain whether there were relationships between these beliefs and various demographic characteristics of the parents.

There are many philosophies, beliefs and approaches to discipline in the classroom from "behavior modification methods" to "reality therapy" to "teacher effectiveness training methods". These numerous approaches have been grouped into three general schools of thought by Wolfgang and Glickman(1980). The first of these schools is the Interventionists who view students' misbehavior as a result of inadequate directions, rewards

or approval; drawing their rationale form the belief that human behavior is based on external supports, conditioning or rewards. The resultant discipline approach is a directive and authoritative manner of handling student problems. This school is represented by Blackham and Silberman (1975), Dobson (1970), and Madsen and Madsen (1970). In contrast, the Non-Interventionists assume that misbehavior is a result of students' unresolved inner conflicts which are resolvable when the students become aware of those inner difficulties. In this view, teachers do not impose their rules on students, but instead allow students to reason for themselves in solving problems. Students are expected to assume most of the initiative and responsibility for making rules and enforcing them. Harris' (1969) and Gordon's (1974) approaches are examples of the Non-Interventionist school of thought. The third school of beliefs, the Interactionists, believe that students learn appropriate behavior by confronting and encountering other people's ideas and formulating their own concepts of good behvior. Thus a reciprocal relationship between teacher and student is seen as the ideal prevention and solution to student misbehavior. Discipline is seen as a negotiated, collaborative and joint responsibility between teacher and students. Examples of the Interactionists' point of view include the methods advocated by Dreikurs and Cassell (1972) and Glasser (1969; 1975). This classification of discipline beliefs is somewhat arbitrary and the boundaries between the three schools are somewhat permeable. Thus, individual teachers and parents may subscribe to beliefs in more than one school of thought, although usually one school predominates.

This study examined the beliefs and expectations held by parents of

preschool and kindergarten age children (ages 3-5). The Beliefs on Discipline Inventory (Glickman and Tamashiro, 1980) was adopted for parents (See Appendix A) and used to identify the extent to which the parents expected teachers or child-care workers to solve classroom problems according to each of the three schools of discipline (i.e.Interventionist, Non-Interventionist and Interactionist). The Inventory is a 24-item forced-choice measure in which solutions to discipline problems in the home and in the school are posed, with the respondents asked to select the solutions they would use at home or expect the teacher to use in the preschool/kindergarten. Each option corresponded to one of the three schools of thought. The parents' pattern of beliefs on discipline in the home could be compared with how they expected the preschool or kindergarten teacher to discipline their child at school. Various demographic characteristics of the parents were also collected. (See Appendix A for the Inventory and Appendix B for the Scoring Key to the Inventory.)

The respondents were 143 parents of children ages 3-5 in a medium-size Midwestern city (population: approximately 150,000). There were 33 males and 110 females in this 92% white, 8% black sample. This racial composition was proportionately representative of the community.

In this sample, a majority of the parents (61.5%) endorsed the Interventionist approach to disciplining their own young child in the home, with 32.1% and 6.3% choosing the Interactionist and the Non-Interventionist approaches respectively. They expected preschool and kindergarten teachers to use the three approaches in about the same proportions: 72%, 23.1%, and 4.9%, respectively. A test for the interdependence of the

parents' own discipline approach and the approach they expected teachers to use showed that they were consistent in their beliefs (Chi square = 32.94, df=4, p .01).

Twenty-seven percent of parents who were either Non-Interventionists or Interactionists at home expected the teachers of their child to be Interventionists, while 11% of parents who endorsed the Interventionist viewpoint at home felt that the teachers should be less strict, thus selecting the Interactionist or Non-Interventionist approach for the school. In short, of those parents who hold a "double standard" of discipline between home and school, there was a greater proportion of parents who expected the school to be a stricter setting than the home and fewer parents who expected the school to be more lenient than the home.

The parents' beliefs patterns were significantly related to their educational background (Chi square = 12.86, df=4, p .02), and to the gender of ther children (Chi square = 15.7, df=4, p .01). Parents were less likely to be Interventionists as their educational levels increased, and more likely to believe in the Non-Interventionist or Interactionist approaches with more education. The parents who had girls only in the family were less likely to endorse the Interventionist approach than parents whose children were boys only or both boys and girls.

The parents beliefs were unrelated to their ages, to their sex (i.e. fathers versus mothers), and to whether they were single-parent families as opposed to two-parent families.

The results of this study indicate that in this community, parents of young children expect teachers to discipline their children in the manner

they did at home, i.e., mainly in an authoritarian style. Studies like this can similarly assess the degree to which parents expect teachers to discipline children in an Interventionist, Non-Interventionist, or Interactionist approach. They can indicate whether parents believe in a consistent approach at home or hold a "double standard" about discipline. Clearer knowledge of parents' expectations will be beneficial to teachers in being able to communicate with parents openly, whether or not the teachers agree with the parents on their discipline beliefs. The knowledge of the discipline approach used at home helps the teacher understand how familiar or strange the teacher's own discipline approach will be to the young students.

This study also suggests that differences in beliefs on discipline among parents may be inevitable, and that it is impossible for the teacher or educator to use a discipline approach which will please all parents in the community. If early childhood educators feel that it is important to be responsive to parental expectations about discipline in the school, then it will be necessary to have several preschool and kindergarten classrooms which each represent the various approaches to discipline. Parents can then select the preschool or kindergarten program for their child which would be consistent with their beliefs.

Another question raised by this study is the meaning of the predominant feeling among parents that the preschool or kindergarten ought to be Interventionist in its discipline approach, which is antithetical to the child-centered philosophy of many early-childhood educators. Does this mean there will be conflict between teachers and parents in this community? Should educators be concerned about this

conflict? If so, in what directions should educators proceed?

Parents in other communities that are similar to the one used in this study are likely to show a comparable set of belief on discipline in the home and school. However, since there are characteristics in any given community or group of parents which differ significantly from the community studied here, it is suggested that educators conduct similar studies in their communities to learn the precise set of prevailing values and beliefs there.

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APPENDIX A:

BELIEFS ON DISCIPLINE INVENTORY

Parent Form 7-80

INSTRUCTIONS: We want to find out whether you believe parents and teachers of preschool age children discipline children in the same way. In each question there are two statements, A and B. Choose the statement that is closer to how you feel. Circle either A or B, but not both.

1. A. I feel that my preschool age child does think, but he/she cannot make wise decisions.
   B. I always respect my preschool age child's emotions and choices.

2. A. I tell my preschooler what toys he/she is allowed to play with in each room of the house.
   B. I allow my child's play only in certain rooms but he/she is free to play anything there.

3. A. I always give my preschool child opportunities to make his or her own choices.
   B. Preschool children (including mine) sometimes do not fully understand what their choices mean.

4. When my preschool child is playing loudly with his or her toys in the next room
   A. I make my child aware of the noise and together we decide what to do about it.
   B. I let the child go on as long as the noise is not bothering the neighbor.

5. If my child breaks a friend's toy, I as the parent will most likely
   A. Scold my child for disrespecting others property.
   B. Have the children settle it between themselves.

6. If my child feels that I am being unfair to him or her, but I (the parent) disagree with him/her then
   A. I will find out from my child what would be more fair to him/her.
   B. The child and I will come up with something fair.

7. When a child does not want to go on a family outing
   A. I explain the value of the trip to my child and encourage him to participate.
   B. I find out why the child does not want to go, and let the child do something else, if possible.

8. When my child begins to have playmates over, I will more likely
   A. Let them play freely and let them make any rules they feel are needed.
   B. Announce the "house" rules and inform them how the rules will be fairly enforced.

9. A. I help my child express himself/herself and be creative as much as possible.
   B. I give my child choices but also make sure my child does not hurt or interfere with others.

10. If my child interrupts an important conversation, I will more likely
   A. Ignore my child until I am finished.
   B. Tell my child how angry I feel and also try to find out how my child is feeling.

11. When a child does something wrong, a good parent
    A. Is firm in discipling the child.
    B. Offers the child several reasonable choices to make up for the misbehavior.

12. When my child is "under the weather" and is very careless or inconsiderate to others
    A. I know his reasons, and I don't expect him to change until he feels better.
    B. I let my child know that he/she was expected to behave, and then we jointly decide what to do.

PART II

INSTRUCTIONS: Answer the following questions about what you expect of a child-care worker or teacher for your child. Whether or not your child is in a group care setting, choose A or B for each item.

1. A. Preschool children are not always capable of making the right decisions on their own.
   B. Teachers of preschool children must respect the choices the children make.

2. A. I expect the preschool teacher to assign the children to regular activity areas.
   B. I expect the preschool teacher to decide where their activity areas will be only after finding out what the children want.

3. A. Teachers should let preschoolers make their own choices.
   B. Teachers should not expect children of this age to understand the full meaning of their own choices.

4. When the preschool classroom is getting noisy, what should the teacher do?
   A. The teacher should conduct a class discussion about the noise and decide together with the children what to do about it.
   B. The teacher should let the activity go on as long as the noise is not bothering other children.

5. What do you expect the preschool teacher to do if a child breaks a classmate's portable 8-track tape player?
   A. I expect the teacher to scold the child.
   B. I expect the teacher to let the two children solve the problem themselves.

6. All the children feel that a classroom rule is unfair, but the teacher thinks it is fair. What do you expect the teacher to do?
   A. I expect the teacher to have the children make another rule to replace the unfair one.
   B. I expect the children and the teacher to jointly decide on another rule.

7. What should the preschool teacher do when a child does not join in a group activity?
   A. The teacher should explain to the child why the activity is valuable, and help the child to join in.
   B. The teacher should find out why the child is not joining, and then let the child choose a more meaningful activity.

8. What do you expect the preschool teacher to do during the first week of school?
   A. Let the children begin making classroom rules they feel are needed.
   B. Announce the classroom rules and tell the children how the rules will be enforced.

9. A. It is important for preschool teachers to develop children's creativity and to help them express themselves.
   B. Preschool teachers should give children choices and decisions but also make sure that the children do not hurt or interfere with others.

10. What do you expect the teacher to do if a child interrupts the lesson by talking to a neighbor?
   A. The teacher will move the child away from the other children and continue the lesson. Time should not be wasted because of one child.
   B. The teacher will tell the children that she or he is angry. Then the teacher will ask how the other children feel about being interrupted.

11. A. A good teacher is firm but fair in disciplining those who break rules.
   B. A good teacher discusses several possible actions with those who break rules.

12. What do you expect the preschool teacher to do when one of the "good" children does not finish an activity on time?
   A. The teacher will know that the child has a good reason and let the child finish the activity later.
   B. The teacher will talk to the child. Together they will decide what should be done.

PART III - GENERAL INFORMATION

Your name_____ Age_____ Father/Mother/Guardian (circle one)

We are a: _____ Single parent family (circle one)
_____ Two parent family

Education: _____ Grade School _____ Some High School _____ High School (circle one)
_____ Some College _____ College Graduate Other:_____

Number of children in your family. Number of boys_____ Their ages _____
Number of girls____ Their ages _____

Have any of your children been diagnosed as being "special" in some way?

Yes_____ No_____ Please specify_____

Is your child enrolled in Preschool? _____Yes _____No
Day Care? _____Yes _____No
Other? _____
(please specify)

I am/was/have/never been a member of a Parent Education Group.
(circle one)

In the future, I plan to continue or to join a Parent Education Group. _____ Yes
_____ No

All responses are confidential. Thank you.

Appendix B

SCORING KEY FOR PARENTS' BELIEFS ON DISCIPLINE

How To Use & Interpret: For each parent who completes the Inventory, match circled answers on the inventory with the table below for Part I. Total each column, Intereventionist, Non-Interventionist and Interactionist. The column with the largest number of responses is the predominant belief the parent uses at home. It is possible to have an equal number in two columns (sometimes three columns), in which case the parent endorses both beliefs equally. Tally Part II the same way. This gives the parents' predominant belief that they expect teachers to use with their children. Compare the totals to Part I with the totals to Part II. This will tell you whether or not the parent believes in a consistent form of discipline at home and at school.

Question	Interventionist	Non-Interventionist	Interactionist
1	A---------- B		
2	A---------- B		
3	B---------- A		
4		B---------- A	
5	A---------- B		
6		A---------- B	
7	A---------- B		
8	B---------- A		
9		A---------- B	
10	A---------- B		
11	A---------- B		
12		A---------- B	
Totals(I)	_____	_____	_____
(II)	_____	_____	_____